

Semantics

Part - II

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Synopsis

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Introduction

“Language is that system by which sounds and meanings are related”
(Fromkin and Rodman)

Modern Linguistics make an in depth study of words and sentences to understand meaning .

To avoid ambiguity the term **Lexeme** is used instead of words.

Lexeme

The use of the term *word* may not be clear.

For example, *sing*, *sings*, *singing* and *sang* could be regarded as different words but in fact they are the variants of the same underlying unit, 'sing'.

A pertinent question arises: If the variants are referred to as 'words', how should the underlying unit be referred to?

Linguists call them **lexemes**.

Thus, **Lexemes** are the basic units of semantic analysis



Semantic Structure and Sense Relationships

Syntagmatic Relations

How lexemes occur in sequences

Example Marriage is an auspicious
(occasion/event)

Paradigmatic Relations

How lexemes can be substituted for each other.

Is that a new car?

No, it is an old car.



Synonymy

Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language defines
Synonymy as

“The Science or systematic collection and study of synonyms; the use and nice discrimination of synonyms”.

It is also referred to as **Synonymics**.

According to David Crystal, “Synonymy is the relationship of ‘sameness of Meaning’. e.g.

Kingly/royal/regal

Pavement/sidewalk

Youth/youngster”



Types of Synonymy

According to John Lyons, ‘synonymy’ can be interpreted in two ways:

- ◀ **Stricter** in which lexical items a and b might be shown identical in sense:

I saw a **madman**.

I saw a **lunatic**.

- ◀ **Looser** in which two items are relative in sense

Example: Nice has good, pleasing, fine, as synonyms

Synonyms

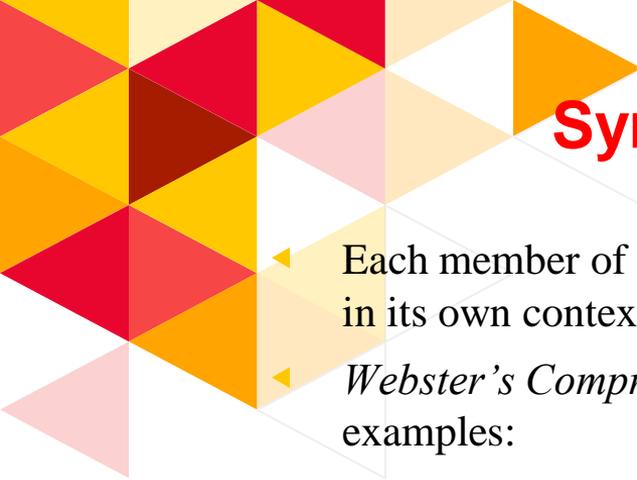
When we try to search synonyms, we find that it is a long process and we discover that exact synonyms are hard to find.

“

David Crystal, therefore, observes, “There are usually stylistic, regional, emotional, or other differences to consider. And context must be taken into account.” Giving an example he continues to say, “Two lexemes might be synonymous in one sense but different in another:

Range and selection are synonymous in *What a nice of furnishings* but not in *There's the mountain.....*”

Dr Johnson, therefore, once remarked “Words are seldom exactly synonymous” (qtd. in Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms, 8a)



Synonyms and Their Contexts

- ▶ Each member of a group of related words (synonyms) has equal validity and usefulness in its own context.
- ▶ *Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* gives interesting examples:

We might speak of a thief as having **stolen** a wallet but a child **filches** candy from a store, and a soldier **pilfers** army supplies. Similarly a valuable document is **purloined**, while funds are **embezzled**. Bandits may **rob** all whom they meet, but they **plunder** the countryside.

What Macaulay observes about Milton's diction is true for all, "Substitute one synonym for another and the whole effect is destroyed" (qtd in Fernald, Preface 2).

Antonymy

“ Antonymy is the relationship of ‘oppositeness of meaning’”. (David Crystal, 106)

Lyons defines “antonym” as the words which are opposite in meaning and “antonymy” as the oppositeness between words. For example, “buy” and “sell” is a pair of antonyms and the relation between these two words is termed as antonymy. ★

Leech puts forward the definition of antonym and antonymy in Semantics that the opposite meaning relation between the words is antonymy and word of opposite meaning is antonym.

And a famous Chinese linguist Hu Zhuanglin simply says “antonymy is the name for oppositeness relation”(164).

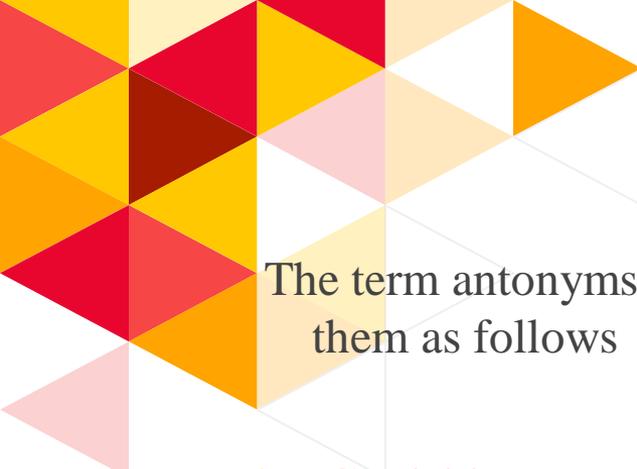


Antonyms

An antonym is a word that is derived from Greek *antonymia* where *anti-* means opposite and *-onyma* means name.

Antonyms and synonyms are different.

Exact synonyms are difficult to be found but it is not so with antonyms.



Types of Antonyms

The term antonyms is used by some for all kinds of opposites but others classify them as follows

- (i) Gradable antonyms
- (ii) Nongradable
- (iii) Converse



(i) Gradable Antonyms

Gradable ones are big x small
good x bad

These can have degrees also very big x quite small

These are mostly adjectives, because they indicate polar oppositeness.

It also means that if you deny one thing, you do not necessarily assert the other. Therefore, being not hot does not necessarily mean cold; and being not cold is not necessarily hot. Between “hot” and “cold”, we can find “warm and cool”.

ii) Nongradable Antonyms - Complementarity

Nongradable antonyms include

awake/asleep, married/single, pass/fail, alive/dead and male/female

According to Cruse the essence of a pair of complementary antonym is that between them they exhaustively divide some conceptual domain into two mutually exclusive compartments, so that what does not fall into one of the compartments must necessarily fall into the other. The members of the antonym pairs of this kind is complementary to each other.

- ◀ For instance, the denial of male is the assertion of female and the assertion of female is the denial of male. They don't have the comparative and superlative degrees. And they don't have the intermediate degree between these two words of an antonym pair.



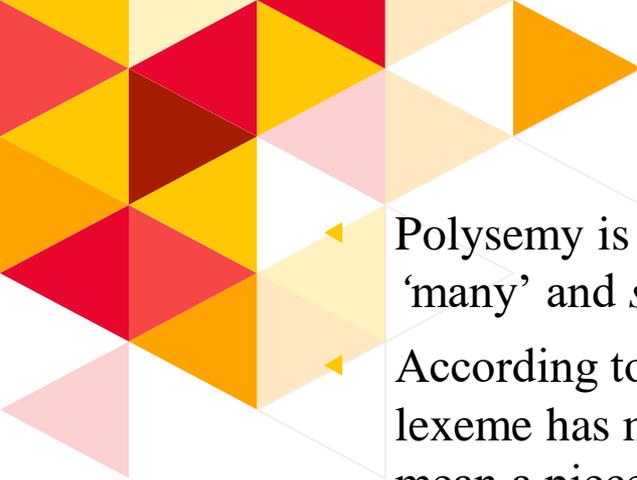
Converseness

- ▶ This is the sense relationship that holds between antonym pairs like *husband/wife, doctor/patient, teacher/student, buy/sell, above/below and employer/employee* .
- ▶ They show a reversal relationship. A is B's husband means B is A's wife. A is B's doctor means B is A's patient. A is B's teacher means B is A's student. It is also known as relational opposites.
- ▶ Egan describes these antonym pairs as pairs of words which include such a relationship that one of them cannot be used without suggesting the other.
- ▶ David Crystal also describes converse terms as “Two way contrasts that are interdependent... one member presupposes the other”. For example, if there is a buyer, then there must be a seller.



Significance of Antonymy

- ◀ A knowledge of antonyms gives a sharper sense of word meaning.
- ◀ *Webster's Dictionary*, therefore, in its Introduction mentions, “**Words that are opposed or contrasted in meaning furnish, oddly enough, a valuable extension of the definitions of the words involved.**” (viii)



Polysemy

- ▶ Polysemy is a term that originated from greek words *poly* ‘many’ and *sema* ‘sign or meaning’
- ▶ According to Crystal, “ Polysemy refers to cases where a lexeme has more than one meaning: for example, *Chip* can mean a piece of wood, food, or electronic circuit”.(106)
- ▶ The term “**polysemy**” dates back to 1897 when Michel Bréal, a French scholar introduced it in *Essai de sémantique*. He opines that it is the result of semantic change.

Sources of Polysemy

- a) The most common type is due to shifts in application
 - ◀ For example, different meanings of red in *red ink*, *red deer*, *red cabbage*, *Red Indian*.
- b) Social setting or environment can also give rise to different meanings, example: *Business partner*, *marriage partner*, *dancing partner*, *tennis partner*, *partner in crime*, *room partner*.

Partner basically means a type of relationship between two or more people. But the relationships of a business partner and a marriage partner are not the same.
- c) Metaphors also create polysemy often. For example, *human body*, *heavenly body*, *body politic*, *body of a liquid*.



Importance of Polysemy

- ▶ Polysemy is a pivotal concept in humanities.
- ▶ The analysis of different meanings of a word helps in understanding its semantic structure.

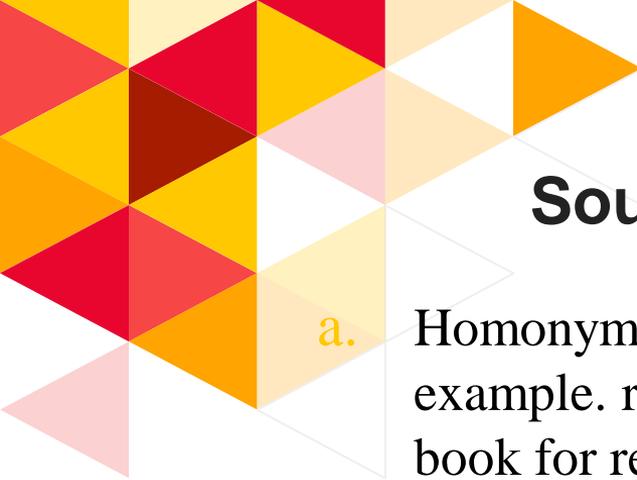


Homonymy

- ▶ “Homonymy refers to cases where two or more different lexemes have the same shape: for example, *bank* is both a building and an area of ground”(Crystal, 106).
- ▶ Homonyms include those lexemes that are half-identical in shape. *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* rightly explains homonym as, “a word that is spelt like another word (and may be pronounced like it) but which has a different meaning.
- ▶ Thus, both **homophones** and **homographs** can be regarded as homonyms.

Homophones and Homographs

- ▶ **Homophones** : Words having same pronunciation but different spellings or meanings: for example, *some and sum* are pronounced as /s^m/
- ▶ **Homographs**: Words which are spelt like another word but have different meanings from it and may have different pronunciations.
Example: wind /wind/ air movement (noun)
wind /waind/ bend (verb)



Sources of Homonymy

- a. Homonymy may be the result of affixation: for example. reader may mean a person who reads or a book for reading.
- b. Abbreviations can also give homonyms: for example COD may mean Concise Oxford Dictionary or Cash on Delivery.



Polysemy Vs Homonymy

- ◀ Similar concepts in Linguistics
- ◀ Both refer to words having multiple meanings

POLYSEMY VERSUS HOMONYMY

Polysemy is the coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase

Has different, but related meanings

Has related word origins

Polysemous words are listed under one entry in dictionaries

Polysemous words can be understood if you know the meaning of one word

Homonymy refers to the existence of unrelated words that look or sound the same

Has completely different meanings

Has different origins

Homonyms are listed separately in dictionaries

Meaning of homonyms cannot be guessed since the words have unrelated meanings



Conclusion

- ◀ Dictionaries treat cases of multiple meanings as polysemy or homonymy. But things are not always clear. David Crystal aptly gives examples of *table* and *pupil* to illustrate it.
- ◀ **Table (furniture)** and **table (arrangement of data)** are treated as same word with two meanings on the ground that they share same etymology.
- ◀ **Pupil (in school)** and **pupil (of the eye)** are listed as different words though they have the same historical origin(106).

Select List of Books

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Happy Reading!